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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: UKRAINE: IN THIS CORNER! EX-CHAMPION KLYCHKO RUNS
FOR KIEV MAYORALTY AGAINST HEAVYWEIGHT INCUMBENT

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Not for Internet.

1. (SBU) Summary: In a March 22 meeting with TDY PolOff, Volodymyr Bondarenko, head of Kiev mayoral candidate (and recent world boxing champion) Vitaliy Klychko's campaign, described campaign impediments including incumbent Mayor Omelchenko's use of administrative resources and biased media coverage, but was optimistic on Klychko's chances for pulling an upset win. Bondarenko opined that an "Orange" majority in the Kiev Rada (city council) was likely, but expressed doubt that his political bloc, PORA-Reforms and Order (PRP), would participate in such a coalition, since it would be tainted by business ties and relationships between Omelchenko and members of the major parties, all of which have endorsed the incumbent mayor. Comment: Complaints of incumbent mayors of all stripes using administrative pressures on advertisers and local media outlets are regular throughout Ukraine, and stand in contrast to the race for the Verkhovna Rada (national parliament), where such pressures have been notably absent. Omelchenko is widely believed to be one of the most corrupt mayors in Ukraine. End summary and comment.

Omelchenko's Heavy Hand

2. (SBU) On March 22, PolOff met with Reforms and Order MP Volodymyr Bondarenko, head of Kiev election headquarters for retired world heavyweight boxing champion Vitaliy Klychko, Kiev mayoral candidate and face of the PORA-Reforms and Order Party (PRP) election bloc. Bondarenko criticized current mayor Oleksandr Omelchenko, who has received the endorsement of all the major parties, for impeding PORA-PRP's campaign, contending that his party's success was the worst prospect for current mayor Omelchenko, because only PORA-PRP lacked ties to the mayor and took an uncompromising anti-corruption stance.

3. (SBU) Bondarenko criticized Omelchenko, claiming the mayor had used administrative resources to support his own campaign, pointing to such tactics as using city financial and land resources to garner good will. For example, Omelchenko has scheduled a press event this week publicizing the laying of foundations for four new university dormitories. (Comment: We do not necessarily see propitious timing of legitimate city hall moves as abuse of admin resources, but rather normal use of incumbency.) Bondarenko claimed that city-controlled mass media had not allowed any positive materials on Klychko to be published, although he acknowledged that the city's Radio Kiev did allow Klychko two opportunities to speak. (Note: We observed that TRK Kiev TV news broadcasts on March 22 favored Omelchenko, while mentioning Klychko and Leonid Chernovetsky (another candidate for mayor, member of Our Ukraine parliamentary faction, and owner of Praveks bank) exclusively in negative terms and ignoring Chernovetsky's press conference that day. Rukh MP Mykhaylo Pozhyvanov, who chairs Omelchenko's campaign in Kiev, was a TV studio guest and called Klychko a "business project" of MP Ihor Hryniv and other businessmen in Our Ukraine who were using his good name to realize their ambitions. (Comment: National alliances do not always explain local rivalries.)

4. (SBU) Bondarenko alleged that the head of Kiev metro (subway) advertising had reported receiving direct orders not to allow Klychko's name to appear, and that other private channels had been verbally pressured to exclude Klychko's advertising. Posters and billboards featuring Klychko's face and thumbs-up logo are prevalent in Kiev at present, but Bondarenko claimed that administrative efforts to block advertising caused them to lose two weeks of campaigning.

Klychko's Prospects

5. (SBU) Bondarenko declined to offer any prognosis for Klychko's mayoral prospects beyond expressing confidence that Klychko would win and acknowledging that it was a close race. (Note: We are not aware of recent polls backing this contention. One survey showed Omelchenko and Klychko polling about 27 percent and 21 percent, respectively. The widely respected Democratic Initiatives' polling from 14-22

February put Omelchenko at 31 percent and Klychko and Chernovetsky at about 15 percent each among likely voters.)

16. (SBU) Bondarenko noted that the vote results would depend in part on the performance of some trailing candidates who might be able to take votes away from Klychko, but who had no real chance in the election. Bondarenko displayed a series of one-page newspapers highlighting Omelchenko's false promises and allegedly corrupt actions using cartoons and humor in a style reminiscent of many past PORA activities. (Note: The PORA party is an offshoot of the pro-democracy NGO that figured prominently in the 2004 Orange Revolution street action.) The papers have a print run of 20,000 and are distributed daily on the metro.

17. (SBU) On the subject of Klychko's potential first steps as mayor, Bondarenko related a series of administrative measures to restructure power in the city, including the elimination of secret decisions in the city government and allowing citizens greater access to information, the creation of micro-regions within large city districts to bring administrative bodies closer to the people, and the reorganization of similar functions, such as medical services, now divided among multiple bodies, into single departments. Bondarenko spoke of the party's general plan for city development and the need to develop a detailed plan based on localized understanding and expert evaluation of land values.

An "Orange" City Rada, likely supporting Omelchenko, but without PORA-PRP

18. (SBU) Bondarenko claimed there was no question that PORA-PRP would pass three-percent threshold for the city Rada, along with Yuliya Tymoshenko's Bloc (BYuT), Our Ukraine, Regions, the Socialists, and perhaps Rada Speaker Lytvyn's party. He predicted no difficulty in forming an "Orange" majority in the city Rada, but he emphatically excluded the possibility of PORA-PRP participating in any coalition that supported Omelchenko. Bondarenko predicted that the ties between Omelchenko and members of leading parties -- including all the parties except PORA-PRP -- would prevent the majority coalition from pursuing a reform agenda.

19. (SBU) Calling Our Ukraine "a business holding company," he alleged that influential Our Ukraine figures including Mykola Martynenko and Petro Poroshenko had business interests in Kiev that made them primarily interested in preserving ties with Omelchenko. Ties between Tymoshenko and Omelchenko were more indirect, he claimed, through oligarch Mykhaylo Brodsky, deputy chair of her campaign, and representatives of the "Zaporizhzhya clan" who had common business interests with the current mayor. (Note: There is no such clan that we know of; even within Zaporizhzhya, the main industrial magnates split their support across a range of parties. This is probably a reference to the two Zaporizhzhyan businessmen on BYuT's Rada list, No. 41 Tariel Vasadze and No. 60 Vasyl Khmelnytsky, who allegedly owns the building in the historic Podil section of Kiev to which Tymoshenko recently moved her party headquarters.) Bondarenko also observed that, in the current city Rada, Omelchenko controlled 72 percent of its 90 deputies, allowing him to effectively control its decisions, and a contingent of these old faces were retained on the lists of various parties.

Bio Note

10. (SBU) Vitaliy Klychko was born on 19 July 1971 in a village in Bylovodsk, Kyrgyz SSR. In 1988, he graduated from school in Kiev, and until 1996 studied in the physical education department of the Pereyaslav-Khmelnytsky teaching institute. In 2000, he completed a graduate degree in physical education and sports at Kiev University and received a doctorate specializing in Olympic and professional sports. He is a six-time world champion kick boxer, three-time Ukrainian boxing champion, and held a number of other world boxing titles, most recently WBC world heavyweight champion, before retiring in late 2005. In 1997, he founded and headed an international fund for assisting the development of sport "Sport-21st Century." In 2003, he and his brother Volodymyr, another world-class boxer, founded the charitable organization "Fund of the Klychko Brothers." In 2005, Klychko was appointed an advisor to President Yushchenko and led the state program "Health of the Nation." He also joined the national coordinating council on HIV/AIDS. In 2005, after a knee injury forced him to give up boxing, he declared his intention of leaving sports and running for Kiev city mayor.

11. (SBU) Klychko and his wife Natalya were married in 1996 and have three children: Ihor, age 5, and twins Viktoriya and Maksimko, who turn one in 2006. In addition to sports, Klychko enjoys music, chess and literature; and in 2003 he

wrote a book with his brother and wife, "Our Fitness: Simple Secrets of Champions."

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112. (SBU) Comment: A Klychko victory at the polls would be a refreshing change in Kiev city government.

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